

PASSING OF A CENTURY HAS LEFT UNCHANGED THE RULES OF THE OLDEST WOMAN'S CLUB IN AMERICA

NEAR the town of Baldwinsville, N. Y., on the old homestead of Elizabeth Farrington, stands the ruins of a little old Puritan church which for years now has been the home of pigs.

Yet, associated with the spot and the few decayed boards remaining are recollections that will ever live even in the memory of feminine clubdom.

It was in this little house that, in the early part of last century, a society was formed by some charitable and socially inclined young women which proved to be the nucleus of the oldest woman's club in America.

It will delight the hearts of the members of Sorosis and of feminine clubdom of the country over to know that this mother of all women's clubs still exists and is in a most flourishing condition.

No woman's club in the United States can boast of such an aged ancestry, and surely it should be awarded the first place upon the roll of honor of all federations of women.

Lysander, N. Y., is its present home, and it is needless to add that it plays a most important role in the social life of the vicinity in which it is located.

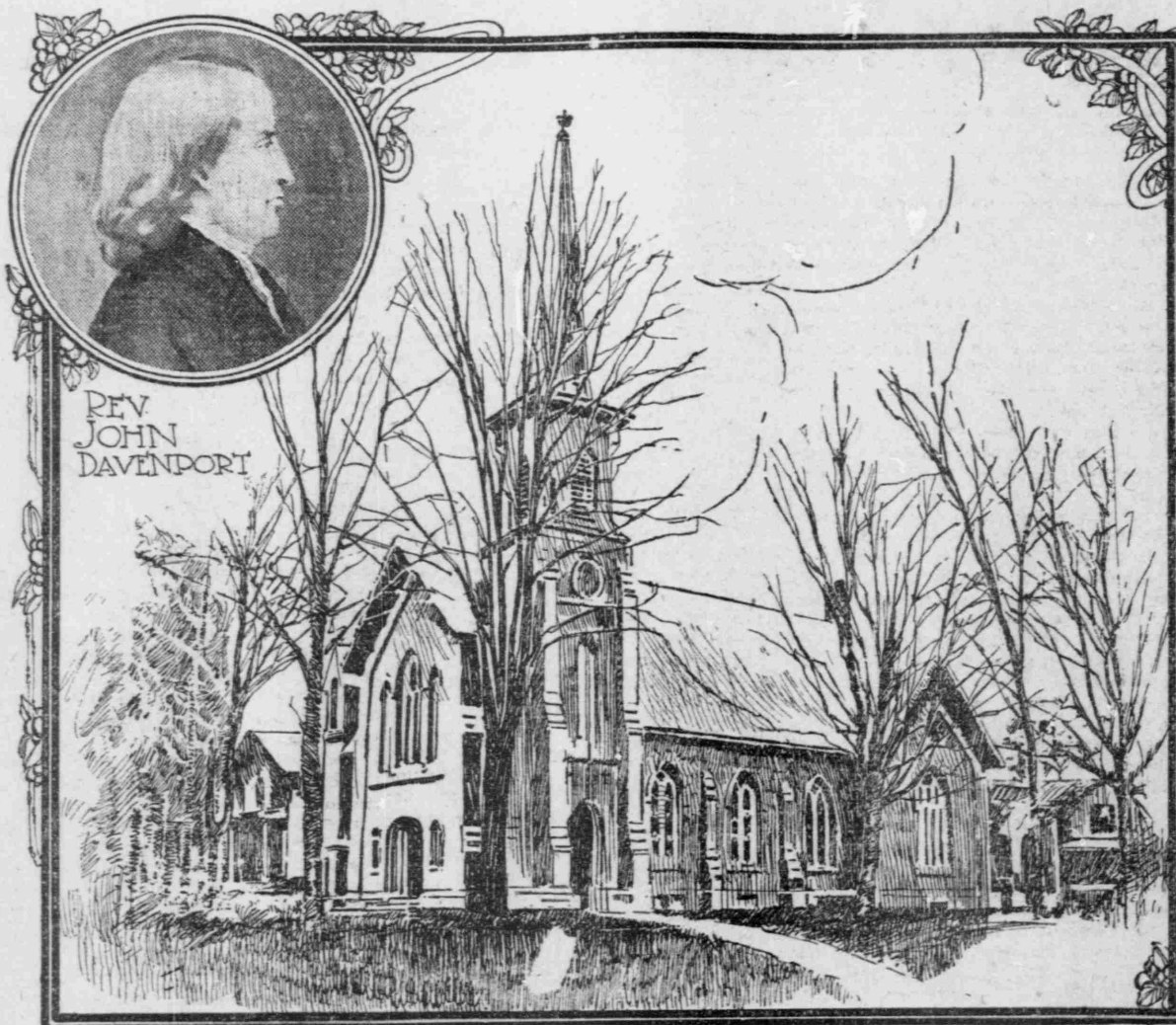
Not a Meeting Missed Since 1817.

Not a single month has gone by during all the years, since Wednesday, July 25, 1817, the date of its formation, that the regular meetings have not been held, and one of the most unprecedented things on record is the fact that there has yet to be heard a dissenting voice against the management or any matter which would be likely to cause a division of the members.

Perfect harmony has always prevailed. There have been no discords or serious controversies, but business has always been conducted with a smooth, rhythmical swing which speaks volumes for the generation of management responsible for its conduct. The keynote of harmony was struck in the beginning and has prevailed ever since.

The original members, of course, are dead and gone these many years but they live green in the memory of the present members, and the constitution and bylaws which governed the charter members were never changed.

Preparations are making for the regular anniversary festival, which will take place June 20, when the eighty-fourth year of its foundation will be celebrated in fitting style.



THE PRESENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - BALDWINVILLE, N. Y. - THE OLD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

For several years the celebration has been held at the home of Mrs. Jane Bigelow, and the fifty odd members who entertain their friends on the anniversary occasions are all descendants of the original members.

The constitution and records of the club are still in existence, many of them being yellow, faded and worn with age. The same regulations which governed the members of the club eighty-four

years ago govern the members of today, and in their rigidity and strait-laced character they typify the old Puritans.

According to the records or minutes of the first meeting, June 25, 1817, "A

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prayer. A society was formed and a constitution."

According to the same records the members referred to themselves as "a friendly association," having as its principal object and aim to show a disposition of charity, not only among themselves, but to any worthy cause.

That no distinction should be made with a feeling that no idea should be had that the members desired to hold

themselves aloof from those less fortunately provided with this world's goods, it was understood that the members should address one another and be designated as "fellow-sinners." Each member pledged herself to contribute

30 cents a year to be expended in providing for benevolent uses, the money to be paid in installments of 12 1/2 cents every three months. The society had no connection with or bearing upon any

religious institution or church, but was strictly non-sectarian and non-partisan.

"Persons of unblemished character," states the membership requirements, "shall be received as members upon their making application to one of the directresses. If any member should conduct herself improperly and refuse to hear reproof, she shall be excluded from the privilege of meeting with the so-

ciety until she manifests unfeigned repentance."

"There is nothing upon the records to show that any member came within bounds of this clause, the presumption being that the Puritanical blood was too strong within their hearts to permit of their deviating from the strict path of rectitude."

"We resolve to be charitably watchful over each other, to advise, caution and admonish, if necessary or useful, and we promise not to resent, but kindly and thankfully receive, such friendly advice or reproof from any of our members."

Almost a Miracle.

Again there is nothing in any of the records from the society's inception to the present time to show any club disagreements or misunderstandings, the natural inference being, therefore, that this section of the constitution, too, was entirely harmonious.

According to the more modern members, other clubs might do worse than adopt similar clauses in their club's constitution, in keeping with these formal and drawn up by their great-grandmothers.

Of the women who gathered at the first meeting of the oldest woman's club, Mrs. Jaac Hamill was president, and the six directresses were Betsy Baldwin, Elizabeth Hicks, Sarah Davenport, Polly White, Charity Westfall and Elvira Hubbard. The other charter members were Polly Ames, Tryphena Ames, Betsy Tappan, Jane Leonard, Susan Baldwin, Gertrude Jacobs, Elizabeth Farrington, Margery Wells, Elizabeth Roman, Sarah Drake, Betsey Waring, Amy Hicks, Lucinda Emerick, Sally Melg, Anne Morgan, Clarissa Hicks, Catherine Shepard, Sally Gilbert, Laura Smith, Betsey Fish, Mary Love, Lucy Porter, Theodosia Butts and Mary White.

All Have Passed Beyond.

One by one they died until finally the last of the original members dropped out of existence. But their daughters kept the society and its objects going, and then their granddaughters, the younger ones of the present membership being the great-grandchildren of the original members, the faces of whom hang in reverence upon the walls of the homes of those who are perpetuating the society formed so long ago, and which has accomplished so much good and left an example which women of the present day over the United States would do well to emulate.

AT THE PISTOL'S POINT—Continued From Page Two

"I tell you," I roared, as mad as the leech, "I'll make you all suffer for this!"

"Slow, now, Firin, slow," said the parson. Having lighted the pulpit lamps, he descended and peered into my face.

"I didn't expect to see such a good-looking man, John," he said. "Somehow, I got the idea that Firin had a beard."

"The girl was clapping and unclasping her hands in an agony of despair."

As the light shone on my face she gave me a quick look.

"Oh, sir," she cried, holding her hands out imploringly. "I pray you, in the name of God, do not betray me! I am not what these men would have you believe. I have not met a lover in this place. But do not—"

"Enough of that," said the parson coolly. "You were always good at acting, Beatrice. But you sometimes get your lips mixed. Now, for instance, you just asked this man not to betray you. If you have done nothing wrong, what is there to betray? Answer me that!"

"I have done nothing wrong!" replied the girl sullenly.

"Curses upon curses!" now put in the old fellow who had first arrived, and who was called John by the parson. "Have I not the proof with me? Listen to this, William, and see if there is no wrong."

He took some letters from his pocket, and the girl made a convulsive movement as though she would snatch them from his hand. He hurried her away.

"Listen, William. This is a nice, lovelier letter for an innocent girl to receive: 'My dear Beatrice—I missed you this afternoon in the village. Do you not go every day now to teach your scholars? I suppose some of them have turned against you, but I will never do so. I have loved you every day since I first saw your pretty face.' This," said John, "is signed T. Firin."

"I never—" began the girl.

"Hold your tongue!" roared John. "You never tell me, I suppose. You are not the Beatrice who never goes to Saugueet to teach music! Oh, no! You—you are a liar! Now, William, listen to this!"

John read another short note like the first. This mentioned a Norah, who was to receive it and transmit it to the hands of Beatrice.

"So! The negress is in the plot! It is strange she is not on hand to accompany them," remarked the parson.

"I suppose she remains behind to steal the silver and then join them," sneered the young man, whom I now hated with a most cordial hatred.

"But this tops all," said John. "Listen to this, and then say what should be done to these two fools: 'My darling! Meet me at the old church to-morrow evening at dusk. By morning we can be far away from here, and begin a new life with our love to make it holy. Be cautious, for one false move will bring those hounds on our trail. Dress as if you were going for a ride. It will not cause comment at your absence. My darling! Never again will cruel hands separate us.' This," said John, "is not signed. But it speaks for itself, does it not?"

"Let me see it," said the parson.

He took the letter. The girl stood shivering with some new emotion—terror, I thought—and her eyes, flaming with her distress of mind, rested on the parson's face.

The letter spoke for itself so far as I was concerned. I had no doubt it was written by the man whom I had seen in the church. He had called her "My

darling! My darling!" in the fervid style of the letter.

Yet, knowing these things, why could I not condemn the girl standing there in her guilt, instead of keeping my mouth dumb, as I was doing after her frantic appeal?

"Evidently," said the parson calmly. "The fellow has feared detection, and has disguised his hand. Yet it is from the same man, undoubtedly."

A slight heating of the bosom seemed to indicate to me that for some reason the girl felt distinctly relieved.

We all stood there, in the fitful glare of the pulpit lamps, a most amazing group: The girl like a doe driven to bay, yet appealing for help rather than taking it upon herself to make a defense; the late John choking and gasping with his overwhelming rage, which got hotter as the scene became prolonged; the younger man with sneering face in which, as he looked at the girl, there was something like a brutal triumph; the parson, cool, steady, but vindictive and resourceful.

The other man had seemed more like a hired hand, and had nothing to say. He gave great assistance, though, with his immense strength, in holding me.

The parson looked coolly at the cowering girl, and then at me. He seemed, on noting my defiant attitude, to come out of his shell somewhat and show us fighting qualities.

"You see, John," he said slowly, "the thing has gone very far, very far indeed. These clandestine meetings in the village; these letters carried to and fro by the negress, this well-planned meeting at the church, and the proposed elopement—it will all cause a great deal of unpleasant talk. John, our house has been mixed up with enough scandal because of these irrational fornicals. The smirch of this affair will cling, no matter what we do. If we take Beatrice home and let this fellow go, what will be the result? She will be ostracized by everybody. She will not—"

"You forget, father," said the young man in alarm. "I love Beatrice, and will—"

"James!"

The parson straightened himself up. His rigid face showed no other emotion than pride and an iron determination to uphold it.

"James! Would you marry a wanton?"

"Oh, no, uncle!" cried the girl, wringing her hands. "Not that!"

"That, and nothing else," said the parson coolly. "Rather than have my son sullied his fair name by linking it with yours I would put him in his grave."

James hung his head. He didn't seem to me to be much of a man, and yet somehow the parson had the evidence all his way.

I pitied the girl from the bottom of my heart. She was so young that I felt she was more sinned against than sinning.

"So I think, John," continued the parson, "things being as they are, that the best thing we can do is to marry this wanton and her chosen lover and let them go."

John, Beatrice, and myself stared like three stupid owls at the parson. His plan was so completely a surprise to me that for the instant I could not speak. And to the girl, who had seen me that day for the first time, the parson's speech was a horrible threat.

But I think it was John who showed the most amazement.

"M-m-marry them!" he stammered. "Certainly," replied the parson coolly. "They are about to elope without that ceremony to sanction their relations. The man is a rascal, I know. But the girl is equally wicked, or she

would not be here now. How will you arrange if you take her back? The thing will simply be repeated at some future time."

"But—but I thought we could lock Firin up," said John.

"On what charge? He has not eloped. Had he abducted the girl, we might have done that. But in the eyes of our ridiculous invidious laws he is innocent of wrong doing because we have stopped him. But the smirch remains. The scandal will be no less. The busy tongues from Clinton to Utica will not say that we arrived in time to prevent this meeting. They will garble the thing and add nastiness to it, till there is no telling where it will end. Now, if they are married, all that can be said is that they are married."

It was his choice, let her have it.

"Oh, no!" cried the girl, stung now into some knowledge of the hideous thing they were planning. "This man is innocent. Find the other and I will marry him."

A sardonic laugh came from the parson.

"John," he asked, "was this man with her when you came in?"

"Yes," said John. "He had his arms around her."

"Then that settles it. Young man, are you prepared to marry this girl whose life and future you are ruining?"

"No!" I shouted, again struggling ineffectually. "I have not ruined her life. You fools! Let me go!"

"Beatrice, are you prepared to marry this man you have chosen?"

"Oh, no!" sobbed the girl, falling on her knees. "Listen to reason! That is not the man I came here to meet. That is not the man I have loved. I met him and he was not his fault nor mine. I swear it! I swear it!"

John seemed to waver, but the parson was firm.

"Who was the man you came to meet?"

"Firin!" asked John.

"No, no!" answered the girl energetically.

"Ah! Then, there is another. Who was the man you came to meet?"

The parson stepped forward to catch her answer better. She lifted her veil and gave me one long, beseeching look—a look I shall never forget.

Her eyes went wildly from one to the other. She seemed lost. Her former reply had evidently slipped out before she thought.

"Who was the man?" demanded the parson sternly.

"I—I don't know his name!" said the girl, and she fell in a moaning, shuddering heap on the floor.

"Damme! But this is getting more interesting every minute," said John.

"They have fixed these lies between them," said the parson. "My plan was to best, as you now see. Stand them together at the altar. I will make them man and wife."

"You will not!" I said hotly, but, with my arms plucked in the iron hands of two tormentors, I was looking down the barrel of a revolver held in the hands of John.

CHAPTER III.

The Mystery Deepens.

A gust of wind came in through the open window and made the light from the pulpit lamps dance on the ugly faces around me.

My brain was in such a whirl that clear thought was impossible. Yet I realized the enormity of the error these madmen were committing.

Their course, from their own point of view, was perhaps permissible. But to make it the thing they thought it was, it was necessary to have the girl's lover in my place.

The girl herself was in a half fainting condition, terror and shame, I thought,

depriving her almost of consciousness. But the determined men knew no halting. They had fixed upon their purpose, and would adhere to it. The purplish rage of John warned me that the finger that rested on the trigger of the revolver would certainly pull if I did not obey.

It flashed over me that the best thing I could do for the girl and myself was to submit. A marriage of that kind, compelled to be gone through at the point of a pistol, was as good as no marriage at all in the eyes of the law. I knew that it could be annulled without difficulty.

Yet it galled me to stand there, the helpless victim of the rage and mistake of these men.

"Stand her by his side," said the parson coldly.

"Hold him!" added John, lowering his pistol and stepping up to the girl.

"No, no! For God's sake, listen!" she cried, leaping from her crouching position on the floor and standing erect before her tormentors.

She threw aside her veil, and I saw with some surprise that she was very young and very beautiful. There was none of the flint in her face. It was now stained with tears and distorted with anguish, but even in that uncertain light I knew that she was not the wayward creature they had made her out to be.

"Come!" said John roughly, taking her by the arm. "We will soon be rid of you!"

"I'll go!" she sobbed violently.

"I'll go! I won't come back to annoy you! But not this! Don't drag an innocent man into the trouble!"

A harsh laugh came from John, and the parson's thin white lips were drawn more tightly together.

"An innocent man would not be in this church with his arms around you," he said coldly. "Come! We are doing that which is best for your own good. You have been meeting this man clandestinely. You were about to run off with him. Well, you have chosen and you shall have your choice. But when you leave here you will leave as a wife. Come!"

The girl's frame shook with the violence of her sobbing. She was clearly almost beside herself.

Her little body swayed to and fro as she looked helplessly upon her accusers. When her eyes met mine a great, heartbroken cry went up and she staggered to the pulpit and leaned against it.

"Oh, why did you come? Why did you come?" she gasped.

"M! Why did he?" echoed the parson. "John hands."

"No, oh no!" cried the girl, wringing hers in agony. "Oh, uncles, you are doing wrong. You are committing a crime!"

"In the sight of God we are doing well," said the parson solemnly.

"Beatrice," I put in, not knowing what other name to call her, "be calm. These men, if they are your uncles, are no doubt doing what they consider best. They are now inflamed with passion because you have perhaps deceived them a little. That I am not the man in the case does not seem to make any difference to them. They are mad. But with revolvers at our heads we must submit. I am an honorable man. I shall not seek to annoy you or take advantage of this gross and ridiculous error. This marriage can easily be set aside and at once. You shall go free. No harm will come of it. We must let these madmen have their way."

"Now we are listening to good sense," said the parson grimly. "It really matters not whether you set the marriage aside or not. The thing is, that she must be your wife before she leaves this place in your company. When we have

accomplished that we shall have done our duty. After that the funeral is your own."

I bowed ironically.

"I'll make it some other fellow's funeral before I get through with it," I said.

The man called John grunted impatiently.

"Are we to stand here all night as a wedding party?" he asked savagely. "Have it over with and let the girl go."

"John hands!" said the parson again.

"By the way, father," put in the younger man addressed as James, "is it not necessary to have a marriage certificate?"

"Not especially," replied the cool parson. "Men and women are married by the law, not by a piece of paper. However, if these two desire a certificate, I shall be happy to give them one if they will call at my house and ask for it."

"There will be no urgent demand for it so far as we two are concerned," I said. "Now that you have cooled down somewhat, let me tell you again that you are making a mistake. I did not come here to meet your niece. I have never seen the poor girl before. I do not, however, find any reason to wonder at her choice in leaving such a gang of crazy relatives. I am not the man she chose. Now, if you will let this matter rest till to-morrow I will prove—"

"Yes!" shouted John. "You will prove your ability in running away. No, sir. We've got you now. We know the relations that have existed between you and this shameless creature. Now, William, proceed."

"Place her hand in his," said the parson.

John took the palsied hand of the trembling girl and laid it in mine. It felt cold and the tremor of it sent a thrill of pity to my heart.

The girl was undergoing the most frightful torture. She was not only being covered with shame, but she was being married to a man she had never seen before, while her true lover was no doubt skulking somewhere in the vicinity wondering what was going on in the dimly lighted church.

I strove to comfort her.

"Be calm," I whispered. "The marriage will not hold. You shall be free to-morrow."

"Do you, Thomas Firin, take this woman to be your wedded wife?" began the parson.

"Look here, you addle-headed ass!" I roared, "if I am to be married, I don't want to borrow any name. My name is Arnold Stagg. If I am married under that name, I can easily set this girl free. But I don't want to get mixed up with any other man's identity. My name is Arnold Stagg. Do you hear?"

I suppose the girl was an assumed name. Well, Arnold Stagg, do you take this woman to be your wedded wife?"

"At the pistol's point, under protest," I said.

"Do you promise to cherish and protect and—"

"I promise nothing. Omit forms. Get your work done and end the girl's agony."

"Do you, Beatrice Forrest, take this man to be—"

"No, oh no! For Heaven's sake, stop!"

"I pronounce you man and wife. And whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder. Let us pray."

Well, a prayer from a Christian heart is one of the noblest uses of language. But it struck me as a frightful sacrilege when that man, after committing a colossal blunder, bowed his head and lifted up his voice to the Most High.

And it was no contrite prayer. Every sentence exhibited the most vindictive

anger against the poor girl and myself. She now, weakened and unresisting, leaned towards me sobbing as if her heart would break. John never took his eyes off me, and his gleaming revolver was ever ready.

"Amen," said the parson, and sighed, as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

"That's all, I guess," remarked John. "No, there is one other thing," said the parson.

He took some blank sheets of paper from a book he had in his pocket.

"James," he said, "I believe you have a fountain pen. Allow me to use it a moment."

James relaxed his hold on me. My first impulse was to strike him, but I reflected that all the harm these men could do had been done. Any further act of violence on my part might, in the future, make matters worse for the girl.

I held my peace, wondering what the parson was going to do next.

He sat down at the little organ and wrote on the paper.

"Come here and sign this," he said to me. Without hesitation I stepped up to him and read what he had written.

"This is to certify," the paper said, "that I, Arnold Stagg, have this day, June 4th, 1888, taken unto myself as my beloved wife, Beatrice Forrest, of Pawnee, Oneida County, State of New York. I promise to love and cherish her, may allow I will support and care for her. I sign in presence of witnesses, who are also witnesses of my marriage to the above Beatrice Forrest."

It was a unique document. Yet I almost admired the wisdom of the parson. The paper, of course, was for them to keep. It would serve in the future as proof that Beatrice had left home as the wife of the man in whose company she went.

"Suppose I refuse to sign that thing?" I asked.

The chill muzzle of John's revolver came against my forehead.

"I don't think you will refuse," said the parson mildly.

Coldly conscious that I was beaten at every point, and wondering how this document would affect the annulment of the absurd marriage, I stooped and signed my name.

"Now, James," said the parson, and John signed as a witness.

"Now, James," and the name of James went down.

"Now, Fitzgerald," and the hired man signed.

Then the parson affixed his signature with a little writing, which I did not see, but which, undoubtedly, was as the officiating clergyman.

"Now, my dear child," he said, taking the cold, passive hand of the girl in his, "you have sinned, but God is merciful. We have been harsh, but we have saved you from worse than you know. To your action should not seem severe, for if you love this man well enough to run away from a good home to accompany him, you should feel gratified to think that now you are bound to him by the legal bond. I hope that no suffering will come to you. Come, John; come, James; come, Fitzgerald."

John stalked out without a word to Beatrice, who was now sinking down helplessly at the foot of the altar. I stepped forward and supported her. James came up and looked sheepishly into the white, miserable face.

"Good-by, Bee," he said.

"Get your unmanly carcass out of here, or, by God, I'll kill you!" I said. He looked at me in surprise.

"She is my cousin," he said.